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Behavioral Health Tech (Psych Tech) Myth Buster

Filed under UNCATEGORIZED

(10 COMMENTS)



Hospital Corpsman First Class April N. Sarani, Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (BUMED) Enlisted Technical Leader (ETL) for HM 8485 Behavioral Health Technician

By Hospital Corpsman First Class April N. Sarani. Sarani has been in the Navy 18 years and has specialized in psychological and mental health for over 16 years. She is the Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery (BUMED) Enlisted Technical Leader (ETL) for HM 8485 Behavioral Health Technician.

I am a Corpsman, but more specifically I am a behavioral health technician (BHT). We were formerly known as “psych techs.” The official name was changed in late 2010. I think it’s good the name changed, as “psych tech” didn’t really capture what my counterparts and I do on a daily basis.

BHTs are a part of Navy and Marine Corps mental health teams. These teams consist of psychologists, psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses and social workers that work together in hospitals and clinics, on ships and forward operating bases. We deploy together as a team in support of worldwide operations. To become a BHT, a Corpsman attends the C school — currently located at the Medical Education and Training Campus, Fort Sam Houston, Texas. The

program is 16 weeks and provides well rounded mental health training for an entry-level technician. BHT’s roles will vary depending on the type of duty and our level of demonstrated experience. BHTs work hand in hand with licensed providers and are an integral part of the team. Often times we are the first line for a Sailor or Marine experiencing a crisis or in need of mental health care.

Nothing makes me smile more than some of the looks I get when I tell people “I’m a BHT.” This gives me the opportunity to debunk some of the myths floating around about the role of BHTs. The top five I’ve encountered about my specialty are:

1. MYTH: I play cards all day (or ping pong). TRUTH: I will be honest and say I did learn to play Spades and Hearts with my patients in my early days, but not because we were goofing around. Games are wonderful tools that are used to put someone at ease and establish trust and rapport. I also did everything from drawing labs, performing wound care, co-facilitating group therapy, conducting patient education workshops, managing patients with drug detoxification and treatment, and mental health case

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management.

2. MYTH: I deal with fakers. TRUTH: BHT's deal with situations and people that make other health care providers uncomfortable. The reality is that only a very small percentage of people seeking care are found to be malingering. The others are truly suffering from a psychological crisis or mental illness. There are many challenges facing our service members and their families. Many leaders and co-workers get nervous when they see that their Sailor or Marine is having an emotional or psychological issue. They are not sure how to deal with it. BHT's know how to deal with it. We care and treat Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), substance abuse, maladaptive behaviors, grief, violence, relational problems, psychosis and depression. People come to us, some with hope, some without, and we provide the intervention that is needed to get them through, give them hope and get them home. It is a great privilege and responsibility to hold this position.
3. MYTH: I am not a "real" Corpsman. TRUTH: What is a real Corpsman anyway? I faithfully took the oath in 1993 and wear the title of Corpsman with pride. Corpsmen make up the largest and most highly decorated rating in the U.S. Navy with our current numbers peaking over 20,000. Every one of us takes a different career path and are blessed to belong to a rating that allows so much flexibility in reaching our professional goals. A wonderful Leading Petty Officer in my early days put it this way, "When a crisis happens, as a BHT, you will be one of the few that are brought to the table." Psychological health is an integral part of Navy and Marine Corps operations, therefore, I will always be a key player. BHTs serve alongside our Marines, on aircraft carriers, and actively deploy in support of military operations. Our roles often identify us a Corpsman first and technician second. I am a Navy Corpsman.
4. MYTH: I never get to go anywhere. TRUTH: The Navy has sent me to quite a few different places to do quite a few different jobs. Prior to Sept. 11, 2001, the BHT could be considered a more fixed Military Treatment Facility (MTF) type of specialty. Things have changed. We still serve at MTFs, but are also overseas, with the U.S. Marine Corps and at sea. The opportunities are endless. Marine Corps billets have more than tripled for BHTs and humanitarian missions request our presence constantly. It is not uncommon for a BHT at an MTF to deploy twice during a three year tour, but this is a good thing and leads us to myth number five.
5. MYTH: Being a BHT is a dead end job. TRUTH: By no means is it a dead end job. I personally know four nurse corps officers, one psychologist, one social worker, two chiefs, and one senior chief who started off as BHTs. A young Hospital Corpsman Third Class BHT from Naval Medical Center San Diego, Calif., (my parent command) was capped during deployment with the Marines and there are many more BHTs that are moving up the ranks based on their performance and the opportunities presented. Any job is what you make it and the opportunities within behavioral health for a Corpsman are endless.

BHTs help BUILD resistance; PROMOTE resilience and AID in recovery. What an awesome community to be a part of! I enjoy educating the Navy and Marine Corps about who we are and what we do. The best thing to happen for a BHT is continued training. It is essential for senior BHTs, psychiatrists, psychologists and psychiatric nurses to provide ongoing training for their techs. They need to help them continue to develop the skills and competencies needed to effectively support the increasing psychological health needs of the Navy and Marine Corps. I would not be half the BHT I am today if I had not had the opportunities provided to me by the docs and nurses I served with. The bottom line is the Navy and Marine Corps need more Corpsmen to rise to the challenge and become a BHT as we are currently 73 percent manned. If you have what it takes or know of someone who does, do not hesitate to speak with a career counselor or the enlisted technical leader (me). You can

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HMCS Thrasher

Wise, and entertaining, words from an astute Hospital Corpsman who is a trail-blazer in the field of public health. Well said Shipmate!

HM1 Zurek

Thank you for dispelling the rumors surrounding our specialty. A well written piece by our very own BHT mythbuster!

SN Alexander

Thanks for the great article! I am currently in corps school in San Antonio and will be picking orders soon. Any one have any details about the psych tech c school? I've heard its pretty hard and may not be a good school to take straight out of A school.

HN David Williams

I like the article. Myself and HN Malone are currently deployed to Afghanistan. We will have the opportunity to go out beyond the wire in an OSCAR team.

HN Smead

@ SN Alexandar After graduating A-school I had slight reservations about becoming a BHT before I hit the fleet, but it truly is what you make of it, being in a small clinic, in Yuma AZ, I've been provided the opportunity to see Active duty Marines for sick call, Dependents and cross train in other Ancillary departments, when I am not needed in my Department, I love being able to brush up on my general duty corpsman skills alongside my duties as a BHT. BHT may not be vital to advancement study but its a position I love and enjoy. HM1 Sarani as always is beyond inspirational.

Dialysis Tech

Love number 3 – “I am not a real Corpsman.....”

The corps reminds me of a human body. It takes every last part to make it whole and complete. Would the eye say to the hand, I have no need of you?

SR Hagin

I hope I get to work with people like you in the fleet when we pick orders soon. You have absolutely solidified my decision to try and obtain this specialty. Thank you for the insite.

Lawrence E Taylor

I was hesitant when asked if I wanted to be a psych tech, and I'm glad I said yes. When I look back on 6 years in the Navy, being on the psych team taught me the most and left me with the best memories. Naval Regional Medical Center, Oakland, CA. HM3 Taylor

Scott

Must say the years at NRMC Oakland (73-77) were great also. Being on 5South was an excellent starting point for launching further degrees and private practice later. Thanks to all. Austin Conkey and Chief Axworthy in particular!

April

I very much appreciate the knowledge and experienced gained by working in the behavioral health environment during my Navy career 1993-2012. As a "psych tech" and BHT, I was able to participate in a wide range of opportunities. I can honestly say, I am better for it. – April N. Sarani, MSW

